

FOSTERING RURAL ECONOMIES IN NEPAL THROUGH ECOTOURISM, SUSTAINABLE PRACTICES AND COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

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4th of March, 2024

I. Abstract

The present study underlines the significance of the transition in written policies, particularly those recognizing the vital role of ecotourism as a catalyst for rural development through a community-centric approach. The focus extends to bolstering gender inclusion and safeguarding natural resources. The sequential progression from Tourism Policy to Tourism Strategy, National Tourism Development Plan, Nepal Tourism Board Statistics and Impact reports, and Programme Partnerships of the Government is meticulously outlined. This structured framework provides a comprehensive insight into the challenges associated with implementation and the assessment of impact, given the diverse roles, responsibilities, and stakeholders involved.

In addition, this document highlights best practices that exemplify the successful engagement of civil society and community-based organizations using a bottom-up approach in implementing actions related to ecotourism and its various forms. Emphasizing local involvement, these initiatives have proven instrumental in fostering rural development. Despite their modest scale, these endeavors serve as valuable blueprints, demonstrating replicable models worthy of recognition.

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III. Introduction

Nepal falls within the classification of 'Least Developed Country,' as designated by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs. The Human Assets Index, comprising factors such as under-five mortality, prevalence of stunting, maternal mortality, gross secondary school enrollment ratio, adult literacy rate, and gender parity index, assigns Nepal a score of 74.9 (2021).

Examining the Economic and Environmental Vulnerability Index further reveals Nepal's considerable disadvantage among other Least Developed Countries (LDCs), with a score of 24.7, notably lower than the LDC average of 39.1 (UN, 2021). This index considers various indicators, including the share of agriculture, forestry, and fishing in GDP, remoteness and landlockedness, merchandise export concentration, instability of agricultural production, and the impact of disasters.

This data illuminates how the societal and economic landscape in Nepal is shaped by limited opportunities in education, employment, access to health services, and infrastructure, along with notable disparities in gender and income distribution. Consequently, the country heavily relies on remittances, with a significant portion of the working-age population migrating in search of better prospects. This leaves rural communities predominantly composed of women, struggling to cope with the challenges of preserving gender traditions, managing land and housing responsibilities, undertaking unpaid care activities, and grappling with the socioemotional impact of these burdens.

On a positive note, Nepal is endowed with abundant natural resources and cultural heritage, attracting nearly 1 million visitors annually. This presents a significant opportunity to stimulate the country's economy and improve living conditions, especially for the most vulnerable populations in rural areas.

In the remote and rural expanses, characterized by natural wonders such as mountain ranges, lakesides, rivers, forests, and national parks, ecotourism emerges as a promising avenue for sustainable livelihoods. It holds the potential to meet basic needs, encourage community retention and return, and extend additional income opportunities, particularly for women.

While the implementation of government-led strategies for rural development through tourism faces significant challenges—limited reach, insufficient resources, and inadequate infrastructure hindering the industry's full potential—Nepal has witnessed growth in trekking and nature-related tourism. Despite these constraints, local communities demonstrate adaptability, actively learning and transforming their services to meet the expectations of the growing tourist demand. This resilience contributes to the positive impact of tourism on these communities.

When acknowledging successful practices in rural development through tourism, community-based organizations, non-governmental organizations, social businesses, and civil society have exemplified the transformative power of small changes and a commitment to improvement and learning. This study emphasizes these instances of program ownership and actions directed toward sustainable rural development.

Undoubtedly, Nepal holds the capacity to transition into a developed country, given its abundant human and natural resources. However, gaps in governmental policy implementation, regulations, and wealth distribution have restrained the country from realizing its full potential.

IV. Literature Review

Socio - Demographic Nepal's Key Indicators

Nepal, spanning 147,181 square kilometers, is home to a population of approximately 30 million people, with women constituting 51% of this demographic. Around 65% fall within the productive age range of 15 to 65 years. The average life expectancy is 70 years for women and 66 years for men. Adult literacy stands at 71% (ADB, 2023).

Data from CBS Nepal in the latest update 2021 reported a total population of Nepal, as of the census day (25 November 2021) is 29,164,578, of which the number of males is 14,253,551 (48.87 %) and the number of females is 14,911,027 (51.13 %). Accordingly, the sex ratio is 95.59 males per 100 females. Annual average population growth rate is 0.92 percent in 2021.

In Nepal basic and secondary education is compulsory, nevertheless the federal budget allocation for education remains below 20% of the total, according to Education International Research (2023). Moreover the quality, inequity and accessibility to education in the country has prevailed over the years, with a negative impact to the children's development according to UNICEF 2022 reports.

As of 2018, 18.7% of the population lived below the international poverty line. The largest proportion of individuals experiencing poverty—43%—resides in mountainous regions, with an additional 27.43% dwelling in rural areas (ADB, 2023).

GDP as a Macroeconomic Indicator

Key indicators reveal that agriculture, industry, and services are pivotal for Nepal's economic growth. While the agricultural sector has maintained stable performance, the industry experienced a notable decline due to increased interest rates. However, the services sector, particularly accommodation and food services directly tied to tourism, faced a contraction that was less severe compared to the industry's decline (ADB, 2023).

Figure 1: Nepal GDP, Country Economic Indicator.

Item	Fiscal Year				
	2019	2020	2021	2022 ^R	2023 ^P
A. Income and Growth					
1. GDP per Capita (\$, current)	1204.0	1166.7	1276.7	1398.6	1396.9
2. GDP Growth (% in market prices)	6.7	(2.4)	4.8	5.6	1.9
a. Agriculture	5.2	2.4	2.8	2.2	2.7
b. Industry	7.4	(4.0)	6.9	10.8	0.6
c. Services	6.8	(4.5)	4.7	5.3	2.3

Source: Asian Development Bank, Nepal Resident Mission. 2023. Macroeconomic Update. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/912721/nepal-macroeconomic-update-202309.pdf>

Nepal holds significant potential for developing its tourism sector, a key driver for economic growth. However, realizing this potential requires substantial investments in infrastructure, connectivity, and local capacities.

Additionally, a notable aspect of Nepal's economy is its reliance on remittances, which serve as a crucial financial support. According to the World Bank, remittances to South Asia surged by over 12% in 2022, amounting to \$176 billion, largely benefiting from robust labor market conditions in OECD destination economies in 2022.

From this perspective, remittances have significantly bolstered the country's GDP. According to the latest 2023 indicator, this figure has surged to 22.7%. The increase can be attributed to a notable rise in the number of migrant workers going abroad, surpassing pre-pandemic levels, as reported by the Asian Development Bank in 2023.

Figure 2. Remittances as Percentage of GDP

Item	Fiscal Year				
	2019	2020	2021	2022 ^b	2023 ^p
E. Balance of Payments					
1. Merchandise Trade Balance (% of GDP)	(33.3)	(27.3)	(31.1)	(33.7)	(26.0) ^b
2. Current Account Balance (% of GDP)	(6.9)	(0.9)	(7.7)	(12.6)	(1.4) ^b
3. Merchandise Export (\$) Growth (annual % change)	12.5	(7.6)	31.0	43.9	(19.9) ^b
4. Merchandise Import (\$) Growth (annual % change)	5.2	(18.9)	26.6	21.9	(22.0) ^b
5. Remittances (% of GDP)	22.8	22.5	22.1	20.4	22.7 ^b

^b Based on FY2023 annual data Nepal Rastra Bank

Source: Asian Development Bank, Nepal Resident Mission. 2023. Macroeconomic Update. <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/institutional-document/912721/nepal-macroeconomic-update-202309.pdf>

Employment and Migration

Despite acknowledging tourism's significant potential to spur economic growth beyond urban centers, Nepal recognizes the wealth of biodiversity, natural resources, and cultural heritage within its borders. However, the objective outlined in the 2015 tourism policy aimed at diversifying tourism into rural areas to enhance employment opportunities remains largely unfulfilled. This shortfall is evident in migration patterns and higher poverty rates predominantly affecting rural regions.

According to the results of the 2021 population census conducted in Nepal, more than 2.1 million Nepali citizens reside abroad. Of this population, 1.8 million (81%) are males. Notably, a substantial number of migrants consist of Nepali students, but the primary focus is on labor migration. This migration is predominantly directed towards countries in the Gulf Cooperation Council, driven by robust economic growth and a shortage of labor. Additionally, the Nepali-Indian corridor is a significant migration route, capitalizing on the open border arrangement between the two countries. The census data provides valuable insights into the dynamics of Nepali migration patterns (CBS, 2022).

Migration serves as a barometer for employment opportunities in Nepal, showcasing a consistent annual increase in the number of Nepalis seeking work abroad, as reported by the International Labour Organization. In 2014 alone, over 520,000 labor permits were issued, predominantly (95%) to men. While Nepali migrant workers significantly contribute to the country's economy, their departure also sheds light on the scarcity of local job prospects. This

trend accentuates gender inequalities, with male migration highlighting the role of women within the country (ILO).

Migrants constitute one of the most vulnerable populations, despite their significant contributions to both the economies of the recipient and home countries. The conditions governing migration and labor lack effective regulation, exposing migrants to risks such as fraud, human rights violations, labor abuses, and a lack of access to justice institutions. Additionally, migrants face exclusion, whether in the recipient country or upon their return to the home country, underscoring psychosocial challenges related to integration and reintegration that public institutions are failing to address. This multifaceted issue demands attention and concerted efforts to ensure the well-being and rights of migrants (MLESS, 2022).

The potential benefits that migration offers to household income and the subsequent elevation of living standards demand meticulous analysis. Migration, while augmenting income, also triggers socio-structural transformations. Particularly impactful is its effect on women, reshaping family dynamics and often resulting in female-headed households—referred to as 'women left behind.' This phenomenon restricts opportunities for active participation in economic development, placing these women in vulnerable positions of financial dependency (Rijal, 2022).

Gender Equality

According to the UN department of Social Affairs, in Nepal there are 30 million people from where 51% corresponds to women and 49% to male, the labor force participation of the population aged 15+ is 28.6% for women and 53% for men according to the world bank.

These data denote how the role of the women involved in economic activities in Nepal has an intrinsic relation with cultural traditions where marriage has a huge weight in the role that the married women is expected to fulfill, in these sense data from the UN Women organization showed that 13% of the women age 15 + are unemployed, in comparison with 10% of men, and in correlation with the 32% of women aged 20 - 24 years who were married or in a union before age 18.

Within the framework of gender perspectives regarding women's participation in the labor market, Nepal has made efforts to promote decent employment for women. Strides have been taken to endorse gender-equitable inclusive growth policies and increase public investments. However, substantial gaps persist in advancing women's economic empowerment. In Nepal, where women constitute half the population, these gaps are evident as women bear the brunt of unpaid care-related work, accounting for 85%—six times more than men. This imbalance serves as a significant barrier preventing women from accessing employment opportunities (ILO-UN Women, 2023).

The interplay of these social factors has significantly influenced economic prospects for Nepali households, particularly impacting rural communities and exacerbating gender disparities. Consequently, prioritizing the reassessment of strategies to enhance the livelihoods of these vulnerable populations has become imperative. Viewing tourism as a catalyst for generating employment in rural areas, prioritizing the inclusion of women, and ensuring that the benefits of tourism reach grassroots levels has become pivotal for economic development.

Natural Resources and Cultural Heritage as Components for Economic Development

Nepal boasts abundant natural resources, including the majestic Himalayas, national parks, and wildlife reserves. Its cultural richness is evident in its diverse tapestry of over 100 ethnic groups and UNESCO-recognized heritage sites. The country also holds ancient religious traditions, housing a living Goddess and the birthplace of Buddha in Lumbini. Additionally, Nepal is home to numerous temples and monasteries of immense significance to Hinduism and Buddhism (Raj, 2011).

The country's abundant natural, cultural, and religious resources have been regarded as a unique opportunity for national development, particularly through the tourism sector. In 2009, recognizing this potential, the Ministry of Tourism and Civil Aviation initiated the Tourism Vision 2020 for peace, people, and prosperity. This vision aimed to position tourism as a key driver of Nepal's sustainable economy, envisioning a destination that is attractive, safe, and distinctive. The goal was to achieve this by emphasizing conservation, promotion, and ensuring equitable distribution of tourism benefits, ultimately fostering greater societal harmony.

Tourism Ambitions

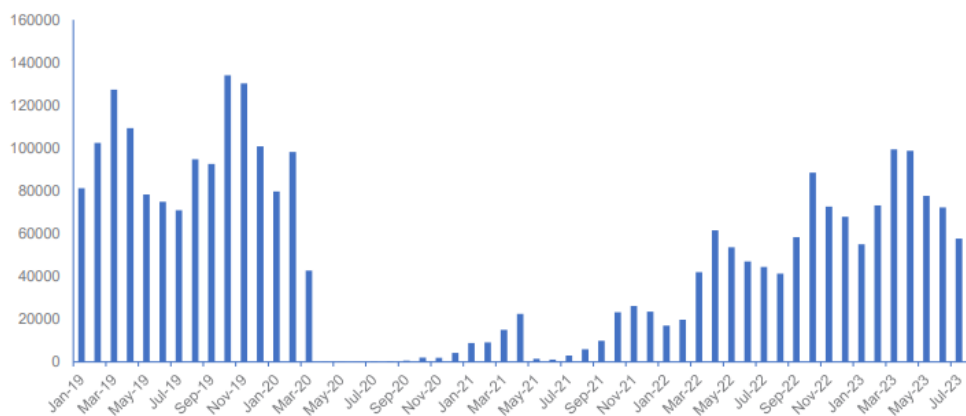
The Tourism Vision 2020 outlined ambitious targets: to elevate annual international tourist arrivals to two million by 2020 and create economic opportunities by generating one million jobs within the tourism sector. However, these goals encountered numerous challenges during implementation, including inadequate infrastructure, limited sector investments, constrained air connectivity, weak public-private partnerships, insufficient resources for promotion, and the concentration of tourism in specific geographic areas.

The devastating 2015 earthquake significantly impacted tourist arrivals, plummeting to 540,000 that year, hindering progress toward the 2020 Tourism Vision Goals. Nevertheless, a notable resurgence occurred in 2019, with 1.2 million foreign visitors. However, the subsequent challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a substantial decline (UNWTO, 2023).

As per the latest estimates by the United Nations World Tourism Organization, Nepal is anticipated to host approximately 1 million tourists by the close of 2023, signaling a path to recovery. However, this figure falls short of the initially set tourism goals for Nepal.

The development of tourism in emerging economies as Nepal has been shaped by many factors. According to the September 2023 macroeconomic report from the Asian Development Bank, the accommodations and food service sectors experienced significant growth, expanding from 12.6% to 18.6% compared to the previous fiscal year. This growth mirrors the ongoing upward trend in tourist arrivals, rebounding from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 3: Monthly tourist arrival to Nepal.



Source: Nepal Rastra Bank. 2023. Recent Macroeconomic Situation. <http://www.nrb.org.np>

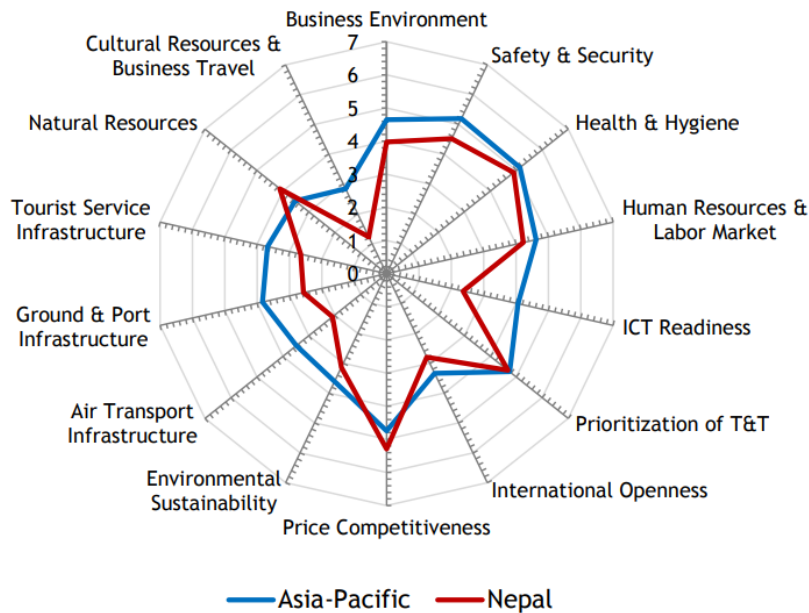
The Nepalese government acknowledges tourism as a pivotal economic driver at both local and national levels within the country's context. It is seen as a sector worthy of expansion and promotion, with a strategic emphasis on safeguarding and enhancing Nepal's environmental, natural, and cultural heritage, as articulated in the Nepal Tourism Act of 2053.

From a broader perspective, the Asia-Pacific region is home to some of the finest combinations of natural, cultural, and non-leisure resources. According to the World Economic Forum, the region's less developed economies, such as Nepal, possess a significant advantage in terms of price competitiveness and have richness in natural assets. However, these advantages are offset by gaps in factors such as tourism development, infrastructure, healthcare, international openness, and socioeconomic resilience (WEF, 2022).

In this context, the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) serves as a benchmark, assessing the array of factors and policies that facilitate the sustainable and resilient growth of the Travel and Tourism sector. This, in turn, contributes to the overall development of a country. As of 2021, among 117 economies, Nepal is categorized as a lower-middle-income economy and is ranked 102nd in the TTDI.

An analysis of the Travel and Tourism Development Index (TTDI) from 2015 highlighted Nepal's comparative advantages over the Asia-Pacific region, particularly in terms of price competitiveness and abundant natural resources that drive demand for travel and tourism. However, Nepal confronts significant challenges, including issues related to International openness for investment, a notable deficiency in the utilization of information and communication technology infrastructure for tourism purposes, and a substantial lack of promotion, development, and protection of cultural resources. This situation persists, as reflected in the 2021 TTDI report for Nepal.

Figure 4. The Travel and Tourism Competitiveness Index



Source: The Travel and Competitiveness Index 2015, the World Economic Forum.

Sustainable Tourism

Sustainable tourism has evolved significantly as a concept of economic development, aiming to foster wealth generation within a nation while preserving its natural resources, biodiversity, and cultural heritage, ensuring long-term sustainability of the social and ecological environment (UNWTO, 2023).

The 1992 United Nations Conference on Environment and Development, known as the 'Earth Summit,' recognized the significance of sustainable development. It emphasized the necessity of balancing economic, social, and environmental factors to meet worldwide needs and preserve human life on Earth. This influential gathering established the Commission on Sustainable Development, serving as the cornerstone for sustainable practices. Additionally, it acknowledged sustainable tourism as an environmentally friendly economic activity.

Since the Earth Summit's recognition of sustainable tourism, various international institutions, NGOs, academics, and development practitioners have collaborated to establish frameworks and guidelines based on sustainability principles. The United Nations World Tourism Organization defines sustainable tourism as the pursuit of maximizing environmental resources while honoring the cultural authenticity of host communities. It promotes tolerance, appreciation of local traditions, and strives for long-term sustainability, fostering employment, social service opportunities, and poverty reduction.

An essential aspect of ensuring sustainable tourism development is the engagement of various stakeholders, including government entities responsible for legislations and policies regulating tourism impacts, as well as stakeholders providing tourism services. Additionally, local communities hosting visitors play a crucial role. Collaborative involvement strengthens alliances and partnerships, ultimately ensuring meaningful and sustainable tourist experiences.

Ecotourism

Ecotourism as a concept was first conceived in 1987 by Ceballos Lascurain, a Mexican architect, environmentalist, and ecotourism and cultural tourism expert as “Traveling to relatively undisturbed areas or uncontaminated natural areas with the specific objective of studying, admiring and enjoying the scenery and its wild plants and animals, as well as any existing cultural manifestation (both past and present) found in this areas”, then adopted by the International Union for Conservation of Nature in 1996.

Since the 1980s, the definition of ecotourism has evolved. Initially rooted in conservation and environmentalism, it has progressively integrated economic development. Despite variations, core elements across multiple definitions include environmentally friendly tourism, responsible and educational travel, low-impact practices, ecocultural exploration, sustainable tourism, and community engagement (Sirakaya et al,1999).

Therefore ecotourism has been characterized as a travel experience to naturally preserved areas, emphasizing wildlife conservation and sustainable use of natural resources. The low environmental impact, coupled with the development of community-oriented, sustainable economic tourism services, forms its core components.

Sustainable practices are essential in achieving the goals of ecotourism. Education and awareness play a crucial role, empowering communities to initiate ecotourism ventures. Implementing regulations for travelers and visitors is vital, ensuring planned visitor influx and activities. This approach not only brings economic benefits but also aids in wildlife and biodiversity conservation. It helps build resources for improving livelihoods and ensuring basic community needs like clean water, sanitation, food security, and job creation.

V. Research Design and Methodology

This descriptive research is conducted with a mix methodology combining qualitative and quantitative data, it analyzes different sources of data, including tourism policies, economic and demographic statistics, academic articles and local experts opinions.

It brings together the hard data collected with empirical data collected from direct observation, expert interviews, NGO’s relevant practices on sustainable tourism, and immersive ecotourism experiences in different natural and rural areas in Nepal.

The employed descriptive approach offers a holistic view on the development of ecotourism as a potential drive for rural economic development in Nepal. By incorporating grassroot information to the relevant governmental and institutional policies, this analysis generates comprehensive findings and recommendations regarding sustainable tourism practices in Nepal.

Research Questions:

- A. How can tourism be transformed into a meaningful economic activity to enhance the livelihoods of communities in rural areas of Nepal minimizing environmental impact?

- B. To what extent do Nepal's tourism policies, strategies, and activities recognize the importance of ecotourism, including its variants, as a means to actively engage local communities and promote women's participation in fostering rural economic development?
- C. How have public or private entities and individuals at the grass root level implemented sustainable tourism practices, offering potential models for future best practices?

VI. Data Analysis and Results

Primary Sources

Experts and Grass Root Organizations

For the data analysis, semi-structured interviews were conducted as a primary source with experts in the field of applied science on tourism development in the region. These individuals have played a crucial role in shaping policies and programs with a sustainable and community engagement approach through their extensive work with intergovernmental institutions: ICIMOD and National Trust for Nature and Conservation.

Expert Name	Expert Profile	Institution	Insight Contributions
PhD. Anu Kumari Lama	Tourism Specialist on the strategic group: "Shaping Green and Resilient Mountain Economies" which actions are focused on "Adapting and Transforming Livelihoods and Economies"	International Center for Integrated Mountain Development - ICIMOD It is a regional independent, inter-governmental non-profit knowledge organization; acquires, creates, develops, exchanges knowledge related to sustainable mountain development. Regional member countries: Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, and Pakistan.	<p>The ICIMOD model facilitates a harmonious convergence of Science, Community, and Policies. As a dual-mandate intergovernmental institution, its bilateral and multilateral collaborations with eight governmental members enable integrated strategies. These strategies encompass research on contemporary global challenges such as climate change, health, migrations, and their economic implications on the social fabric. The translation of this research into policies has led to positive changes, adopting a comprehensive perspective and designing solutions with a 360° approach.</p> <p>Significantly, in the Sustainable Tourism sector, there has been a notable shift in the model's approach. It has transitioned to a framework centered on Green Economies, Inclusion, and Climate Resilience, contributing to the pursuit of SDGs by 2030.</p> <p>In Nepal, ICIMOD closely collaborates with provincial and local governments in implementing these models. Embracing a participatory approach, communities are actively involved in program planning, ensuring that local leadership guarantees conservation efforts.</p>
PhD. Siddhartha Bajra Bajracharya	Professional expertise in biodiversity conservation, community engagement, protected area management, conservation policy, sustainable tourism development and	National Trust for Nature Conservation - NTNC The National Trust for Nature Conservation (NTNC), previously known as the King Mahendra Trust for Nature Conservation was established	As the former director of the NTNC and a key contributor to the establishment of the Annapurna Conservation Area, Dr. Bajracharya brings a wealth of scientific and practical knowledge. This expertise enabled them to successfully lead the design, implementation, and sustainable

	<p>management, integrated conservation and development, and sustainable livelihood.</p>	<p>in 1982 by a Legislative Act as an autonomous, not-for-profit and non-government organization, mandated to work in the field of nature conservation in Nepal. For over two decades, the Trust has successfully undertaken over 200 small and large projects on nature conservation, biodiversity as well as cultural heritage protection, ecotourism, and sustainable development. The Trust's experience over the years has shown that conservation efforts in low income economies, such as Nepal, cannot be successful, much less sustainable, unless the needs and welfare of the local people are addressed. Holistic and integrated conservation and development programme with active people's participation aimed at promoting local guardianship, have been the focus of all the Trust activities.</p>	<p>management of the conservation project.</p> <p>In the late 1970s, concerns about the degradation of natural resources in the Annapurna region surfaced. The increasing number of mountain visitors seeking nature experiences and amenities like hot showers and meals led to deforestation and sanitation issues, compounded by a lack of waste management plans, contributing to environmental deterioration.</p> <p>Initial attempts to address these issues were inspired by the U.S. national park model, such as Yellowstone, implementing strict regulations for visitors and conservation policies. However, given the Annapurna region's potential to attract tourism as a driver for economic growth, this approach did not seem beneficial for the local communities. Consequently, Dr. Bajracharya proposed and led an alternative plan based on three key principles: 1. Nature Conservation, 2. Livelihoods for Local Communities, and 3. Tourism as a Tool for Conservation.</p> <p>These principles formed the basis of a sustainable conservation program, initially supported by seed funds that eventually transformed into tourism-generated revenues, fully sustaining the program.</p> <p>The changes in environmental conservation have been gradual, spanning over three decades, yet small practices have yielded a profound impact on conservation and natural resources management. One notable example is the introduction of Improved Cooking Stove Programs (ICSPs). Unlike open fires or rudimentary stoves, the latter consumes more fuelwood, placing an increased burden on women. Given that women are primarily</p>
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			<p>responsible for cooking and collecting biomass, particularly fuelwood from the forest, the use of biomass energy and low-grade biomass fuels results in excessive levels of indoor smoke/air pollution. This poses a health risk, with women and children, in particular, being exposed to the emitted smoke.</p> <p>Studies reveal that ICS demonstrates an efficiency of 15-25%, leading to fuel wood savings of 30-35%. This, in turn, significantly reduces the drudgery for women, as ICS reduces cooking time and minimizes the hardship associated with the collection of scarce fuel wood.</p> <p>ICS, grounded in scientific concepts, is a simple technology that is easy to operate. Users generally encounter no severe technical problems during its operation.</p> <p>As emphasized by Dr. Bajracharya, programs focused on community engagement and awareness play a crucial role in fostering attitudinal changes, ultimately achieving the dual objectives of conservation and the enhancement of livelihoods in the region.</p>
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Additionally, this study analyzes six open interviews conducted with social businesses and non-governmental grass root organizations. Direct observation during immersive experiences is also examined to provide evidence of the significant efforts invested in the development of various forms of ecotourism, such as community tourism, mountain tourism, and agrofarm tourism. The research delves into the implementation of sustainable practices, exploring the involvement of the community and the role of women in these initiatives.

1. Community HomeStay Network
2. Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP)
3. Girls Empowered by Travel - Nepal
4. Patlekhhet Eco Farm-House
5. Smart Paani
6. LACCoS Langtang Area Conservation Society

The following analysis aims to highlight successful practices implemented to foster sustainable growth through tourism as a catalyst. These initiatives commence at the community level, addressing both local and social needs. By actively engaging individuals, they strive to bring about social change that positively impacts the entire community and environment.

Community Homestay Network

<https://www.communityhomestay.com/>

As an illustration of how sustainable practices foster community development in Nepal, the social enterprise Community Homestay Network (CHN) stands out. This initiative focuses on community-based tourism, prioritizing local ownership and management of the tourism experience. Its core objective is to ensure that economic benefits from tourism remain within the community.

They commenced their operations in 2012 in Panauti, situated on the outskirts of Kathmandu, and have expanded their social initiatives to encompass over 30 communities. The social business model employed fosters partnerships between homestay providers and various enterprises and organizations. These partnerships not only propel tourism development but also offer sustainable solutions such as WASH (Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene) and conservation of natural resources.

They have a key component on building capacities, through the training in homestay management, English language and hospitality ensuring a socio-cultural component to the traveler experience, and moreover they set a percentage of the profit to a community fund which allows the development of infrastructure which will promote the inflow of community tourism.

The (CHN) emphasizes capacity building by providing training in homestay management, English language, and hospitality. This ensures a rich socio-cultural experience for travelers. Additionally, a percentage of the profits contributes to a community fund aimed at infrastructure development, fostering further community tourism and creating a value chain starting by the community tourism motivation and followed by each actor involved in the experience enhancing the engagement of the community with visible benefits for them.

The cornerstone of ecotourism lies in its primary asset: biodiversity. This form of travel emphasizes a low carbon footprint, prioritizing the consumption of local goods and fostering a commitment to exploring nature while minimizing environmental impact. It goes beyond mere landscape and biodiversity engagement, focusing on immersing travelers in eco-socio-cultural heritage. This immersive experience that the home stays provide not only contributes to the local economy but also plays a pivotal role in nurturing sustainable development.

Kathmandu Environmental Education Project

<https://keepnepal.org/>

Education becomes relevant as the basic element to develop skills on a community that can be translated in better income opportunities which had a direct impact in the livelihoods of the people, in Nepal education and literacy had been recognized as one of the most effective and tested means of promoting sustainable development in tourism, which promotes upward socioeconomic mobility and the eradication of poverty (Kaini et al, 2023).

Under this context the labor of non governmental organizations have become relevant providing non formal training to the population that has been negatively impacted by the lack of accessibility to education and where gender and socioeconomic and ethnic differences, becomes relevant.

In this sector Kathmandu Environmental Education Project (KEEP) has looked to the combination of natural environment, indigenous culture, heritage sites and local communities that Nepal has as a potential to promote sustainable tourism which allows the traveler to experience the richness elements of the country with the focus on minimizing the impact to the environment.

KEEP has been working with Porters of the Himalayan Ranges, to provide them non-formal education opportunities relevant to leverage their service, with english language, wilderness first aid, eco leadership trekking and environmental awareness courses to name some, which not just empower the skills of the people but, promotes sustainable practices, shifting the perspective of the local community to give more value to the environment as the main driven of the tourism in this specific area.

Girls Empower by Travel - Nepal

<https://girlsempoweredbytravel.org/>

Girls Empower by Travel - Nepal is an NGO spearheaded by Sajana Bhadel, originally from Changuarayan. After witnessing the dire impact of the 2015 earthquake on her neighbors' community homestays, she took the initiative to support their development. Inspired by her insatiable curiosity to explore beyond her immediate surroundings and propelled by her Russian friend and co-founder, Lena Zubareva, they embarked on a mission to challenge traditional gender roles within communities and dispel the apprehension surrounding travel. Their concept, termed 'Hitasi' in Nepali, meaning 'Best Friend,' symbolizes a sisterhood commitment. With this vision, they aim to unite rural and urban girls across Nepal, fostering a platform for learning, sharing, and mutual support to transcend the boundaries of cities and communities.

Since 2017, their dedicated efforts have led to the establishment of the Hitasi program. The initiative saw the first five girls from Kathmandu venture into rural communities in the southern region of Nepal, engaging in an enlightening eight-day journey. During this exchange, they shared experiences with local rural girls, fostering a mutually beneficial cultural and informal educational experience. This interaction inspired both groups to explore innovative ways of connecting with their communities, families, and the wider world, while also cultivating essential leadership skills among all participants.

Sponsored by esteemed international institutions such as the Global Fund for Women, their initiatives have impacted over 2000 girls through various programs and activities. Their efforts have notably led to the establishment of six homestays in the Langtang region and the empowerment of women guides in trekking. These endeavors emphasize the profound impact of both formal and informal education on young women, creating a ripple effect that significantly improves their quality of life and that of their families and communities.

Patlekhhet Eco Farm-House

<https://patlekhhetecofarm.com.np/>

Patlekhhet Eco Farm-House is a family initiative spearheaded by Bishnu Tiwari, hailing from the Patlekhhet community approximately 11km from Dhulikhel city. Bishnu's upbringing, where he walked a considerable distance to school, sheds light on the challenges many Nepalis faced accessing education merely two decades ago, challenges still prevalent in remote rural areas today. Motivated by these experiences, Bishnu delved into agricultural studies, recognizing it as a key economic driver for Nepal.

After gaining valuable insights while working for a public institution, Bishnu made a conscious choice to impart his acquired knowledge back to his community. He emerged as a pioneer in implementing permaculture practices in Patlekhhet and its surrounding areas, aiming to create sustainable models for agricultural development.

Permaculture represents a regenerative approach to sustainability, often recognized as a design system centered around gardening, farming, food production, and homesteading. Bishnu has been instrumental in imparting these permaculture principles to his family and community. Through dedicated efforts, they have transformed their lands, engaging in cultivation, environmental stewardship, culinary endeavors, creative pursuits, and skillful craftsmanship.

Their focus extends beyond practical implications; it embodies a way of life that has enriched their existence and resonated with visitors who partake in their agro-cultural experiences. This practice has sparked inspiration, encouraging others to follow suit and embrace a lifestyle that intertwines rural cultural traditions, agricultural activities, and tourism.

Bishnu and his family's project stand as a beacon of community engagement, leveraging natural resources and indigenous rural wisdom to foster development within the entire community.

Smart Paani

<https://smartpaani.com/>

Nepal faces significant challenges concerning water access, with numerous water sources contaminated. The city of Kathmandu frequently grapples with inadequate provision of clean water, leading households to incur expenses in acquiring water from alternative sources to meet their daily consumption needs. This reliance has a detrimental effect on the local economy.

The issue of access to clean water extends beyond urban areas; rural regions face significant challenges due to inadequate infrastructure that prevents people from enjoying their fundamental right to clean water. Reliance on streams and wells in these remote areas, often contaminated, poses health risks to family members, especially children and the elderly, frequently causing illnesses.

This issue represents just the beginning of a series of challenges. When a child falls ill, the responsibility for their recovery falls on the mothers. Simultaneously, these mothers are tasked with the burden of fetching water from available sources, often necessitating long walks while carrying heavy containers.

Smart Paani is a Nepali enterprise working in the water sector with the mission to provide accessibility to safe water to all classes of the society, their solutions are designed and customized including rainwater harvesting, water filtration, water recycling and wastewater treatment. To date Smart Paani has successfully installed 4000 systems across more than 32 districts in Nepal, with a vision to expand to the Terai region.

Smart Paani collaborates closely with local governments, public school boards, and CSR companies to forge partnerships aimed at promoting their Filter-Plus WASH in School Model. This initiative involves the installation and maintenance of durable water filters, alongside WASH training for students and the community, ensuring sustainability. This direct involvement has significantly enhanced health conditions for school students and their families.

A notable success story involves the installation of plumbing and water filters in Maaji Gaon – Sindhupal Chowk community, where residents, especially women, previously had to endure a two-hour walk to access water sources. The impact on the infrastructure has been tremendous for the inhabitants

The accessible technologies provided by Smart Paani in Nepal hold significance for this study, focusing on sustainable practices not only for businesses and households in urban areas but also engaging communities in adopting improved sanitation behaviors. Additionally, Smart Paani plays a pivotal role in the tourism sector, where travelers increasingly inquire about eco-friendly and sustainable policies in their accommodations. This demand has prompted service providers to adopt more sustainable solutions in their daily operations.

LACCoS, founded in 2007 by a dedicated group of local youth in Rasuwa district, Nepal, is a non-governmental and non-profit organization. Focused on environmental conservation and livelihood enhancement, LACCoS aims to foster natural resource-based socio-economic development. The organization strives to create synergy among community groups, local line agencies, and external support to achieve its overarching goal.

The initiatives spearheaded by LACCoS have yielded significant positive outcomes in various realms. Under the Sustainable Conservation Programmes, the organization has successfully established and managed the Langtang Region Tourism Information Center. Additionally, LACCoS has made impactful strides by implementing WASH programs in remote villages of Rasuwa, distributing solar lights within nomadic/yak herder communities to advocate alternative energy solutions.

The organization's commitment to awareness extends through issued-based campaigns, resonating not only within the local community but also reaching visitors to the region. LACCoS hosts events that promote environmental and biodiversity conservation, amplifying their influence.

Furthermore, LACCoS has made noteworthy contributions through capacity building and livelihood support programs. These initiatives include training locals in climate change mitigation, skill development, sustainable forest management, and the promotion of ecotourism trails, eco-farming, and nature-based tourism activities, among others. The holistic approach reflects the organization's dedication to fostering sustainable development and conservation practices in the region.

The organization adopts an approach that strengthens leadership capacities, particularly among women and socially disadvantaged groups, by offering training opportunities. Through active engagement with diverse stakeholders, the organization ensures the more effective achievement of its objectives.

The positive outcomes of investing in community and individual skills are evident in various services and developments within the region. Notable improvements include enhanced hospitality practices and the implementation of resilient agricultural activities, such as the establishment of greenhouses in small villages to promote food sovereignty. These spillover effects underscore the organization's impact on fostering sustainable practices and community development.

Secondary Sources

Tourism Policies, Strategic Plans and Impact Reports

As secondary sources, six reports from Governmental and Intergovernmental Institutions were selected. These reports are categorized under Tourism Policy, Tourism Strategy Plan, or Tourism Impact Report. The analysis focuses on assessing the significance of the objectives outlined in each source related to ecotourism, rural development, livelihood enhancement, and gender equality. The evaluation aims to assess the substantive impact of these objectives.

1. Tourism Policy 2065 - Nepal Tourism Board.
2. In Focus 2021 - Nepal Tourism Board.

3. Sustainable Tourism for Livelihood Recovery, March 2022 - Nepal Tourism Board & UNDP.
4. Sustainable Tourism Enhancement of Nepal's Protected Areas, May 2019 - Ministry of Finance of Nepal & The World Bank.
5. Nepal Tourism Statistics 2022 - Government of Nepal: Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation.
6. The National Tourism Strategy Plan for Nepal 2014 - 2023 - Nepal Tourism Board.

Type of Publication	Type of Source	Source	Name of the Publication	Main Objectives and Impact
Tourism Policy	Governmental	Nepal Tourism Board	Tourism Policy 2065	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Leading role of the private sector in tourism. - Partnership approach: Public-Private-People. - Emphasis on Rural Tourism, Community Based Tourism and Homestays. - Formation of Tourism Coordination Committee and Crisis Management Committee.
Impact Report	Governmental	Nepal Tourism Board	In Focus 2021	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Porter's Awareness training in Rasuwa: 203 beneficiaries. - HomeStay orientation program in Karnali: 75 beneficiaries from 7 provinces. - Infrastructure projects: Signage for trekking in the Langtang region. - Immediate livelihood support for the most vulnerable: Employment of the community on cleaning and beautifying trekking routes. - Community Integration: Maintenance and reparations of Annapurna trekking trails
Impact Report	Governmental & Intergovernmental	Nepal Tourism Board & UNDP	Sustainable Tourism for Livelihood Recovery March 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Short term employment opportunities: 6000 tourism workers, including 1500 women, creating 100,00 person days of employment. - Construction of 60 small scale tourism infrastructures: including foot trails, cycling trails, wooden bridges, tourist information center, tourist visitor resting shelter and river protection infrastructures.
Strategic Projects	Governmental & Intergovernmental	Ministry of Finance of Nepal & The World Bank	Sustainable Tourism Enhancement of Nepal's Protected Areas May 2019	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Improved infrastructure for transportation, urban and tourism services: A new international airport which has just started being constructed in the southeast of the city will improve access when completed. - Sarangkot Development Project: Included in the project are cable car, iconic structure, resorts, summit plaza and public amenities, access to the summit plaza, upgrading of access road and trails. - Old Bazaar Development Project: Included in the project are remodeling and preservation of old Newari buildings, galleries, workshops or schools of artists and artisans, cafes, restaurants. - Dhunge Sanghu Seti Gorge Development Project: Included in the project are a lights & drama show at cliff, upgrading of International Mountain Museum, adventure activity training center, cliff/rock climbing, cliff walking, horse-back riding. - Begnas & Rupa Area Development Project: Included in the project are resort

				<p>development, more regulated development of retail shops at the entrance, circular observation walk, large-scale water performance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Environmental Conservation: Fewa Lake Conservation, improving degrading water quality, solid waste disposal, stopping illegal & unregulated construction, removing invasive plants, and stopping & reversing siltation. - Conservation of Other Tourism Assets: Awareness program, preparation of conservation plans and stopping illegal squatting & encroachment. - Urban beautification: awareness program, cleaning neighborhoods, and improving air & noise pollution.
Impact Report	Governmental	Government of Nepal: Ministry of Culture, Tourism & Civil Aviation	Nepal Tourism Statistics 2022	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Total Tourist Arrivals: 614,869 - With a Trekking & Mountaineering tourist purpose: 61,701 / 10% of the total. - Trekking Guides registered: 25,483 - Number of visitors to Langtang National Park: 2,498 - Number of Visitors to Annapurna Conservation Area: 5,452 - Total number of foreigners visited national parks and conservation areas: 75,608 - Earnings from tourism: In 2022, gross foreign exchange earning was Nrs. 46,756,824 thousand (Around 326,282 thousand US\$). Contrary to increased in total gross foreign earning , Per day expenditure decreased from 48 USD per tourist per day in 2021 to 40.5 USD per tourist per day in 2022 - Tourism Industry: All total 1,401 (star and tourist standard hotels) are operated in 2022, with bed capacity 53,365 per day. Travel agencies, tour guides, tour operators, rafting agencies, trekking agencies and guides all are slightly increased, in 2022 the number of registered Travel agencies reached up to 4,773 and Trekking agencies are 3,136. - Tourism and Education: National Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management (NATHM) is a public institution that develops skilled human resources in the tourism sector. From F/Y 2029/30- 2078/79, total 364 students enrolled in Master of Hospitality Management (MHM), 2,460 Bachelor of Hotel Management (BHM) and 1,612 Bachelor of Travel and Tourism Management (BTTM). Similarly, different tourism related Mid-level and supervisor level trainings provided for 52,742 persons. - Gender and Education: From 57,178 students enrolled in higher education at the National Academy of Tourism and Hotel Management, just 9,811 are women.
Strategic	Governmental	Government of	Strategy and	- Social and cultural well-being and economic prosperity of local

Projects		Nepal, Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation	Action Plan 2016 - 2025 Chitwan - Annapurna Landscape, Nepal	<p>communities are enhanced, especially among women and disadvantaged groups.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Good governance is practiced and contributes to strong inter-sectoral coordination, with meaningful gender and social inclusion and strong multi stakeholder capacities. - Promotion of both innovative and traditional livelihood opportunities based on sustainable resource use, tourism, and green enterprises for economic prosperity, equity and social justice. - To improve the well-being of local communities through sustainable, climate-smart natural resources and integrated land and water management and development, to support livelihoods, promote socio economic prosperity, and protect natural assets of national economic importance from natural disasters. - Gender equality and social inclusion: Women, marginalized and socially excluded people will be actively engaged to ensure equitable representation in policy and program formulation, and implementation under this strategy. GESI provisions will be mainstreamed in all policies and guidelines and implemented.
Policy	Governmental	Nepal Tourism Board	The National Tourism Strategy Plan for Nepal 2014 - 2023	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Developing model teahouses along the Great Himalaya Trail. - Developing Kagbeni into a micro-destination in the Annapurnas preserving its heritage through tourism, improving visitor satisfaction and providing enough stable source of income to the area to effectively implement long term sustainable economic upliftment in the entire area. - Developing a cycling network promoting road biking and mountain biking with an aim to diversify the product base and promote areas close to a major hub, this project would promote Daman, Chitlang, Bhimphedi, Pharping and Hetauda. The network will be locally owned, developed centrally but managed locally. - Developing Kathmandu into a hub for rock climbing in the region. This project aims to diversify and improve Nepal's product base by developing the rock surfaces available in Kathmandu at Nagarjun, Hattiban and Nagarkot with well-marked, safe routes and bring rock climbing into the mainstream tourism products of Nepal. - Developing a village tourism network in Bandipur the project would provide training, micro-finance, support and promotion to enable the Village homestay owners promote and market their products. - Identify the current and future skills requirements of the tourism industry and develop a tourism HR plan for the next five years.

				<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Develop National Tourism Standards and accreditation systems. - Reduce the brain drain of trained Nepalese workers. - Provide training and development for the informal tourism sector. - Design and deliver public sector training. - Review and update trekking and tour training and standards. - Upgrade the research and teaching quality of NATHM academic staff. <p>Review the future status of the Mountain Academy of Nepal (MAN).</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using tourism to tackle rural poverty: To reduce poverty at the tourist destination, there is a need to formulate a targeted policy to enable the poor to participate actively in tourism and take advantage of available opportunities created by the industry. Direct and indirect local employment at tourism destinations and the production and supply of goods and services to tourists and tourism-related facilities needs to be emphasised in the policy. There is high scope for jobs creation in rural tourism in the following sectors: the construction industry, hotels, restaurants, bars, the handicrafts sector and related activities. - A special Unit for community development within NTB could be established to deal with local participation in tourism at the center and in the regions. Community groups could play a vital role in establishing local governance, especially to develop, regulate and ensure responsible tourism. The Unit would be given authority to guide groups and provide them with information and to be proactive in identifying needs and opportunities. The Unit would work closely with NGOs, private sector organizations, local government and tourism committees to link and connect them to provide a wider community of support.
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VII. Discussion

The provided literature and recent data from the different sources cited strongly indicate that Nepal boasts abundant natural resources. These include a significant forested area encompassing at least a quarter of the national land, plentiful water resources originating from major rivers, lakes, and melting mountain snow, agricultural land constituting nearly 20% of the territory, and rocky terrain covering 40% of the country, notably the Himalaya Range housing the world's tallest peak. These resources have consistently attracted ecotourism to Nepal over the years, playing a crucial role in the country's economic growth.

Despite the upward trajectory in visitor numbers to Nepal and its favorable cost competitiveness, the tourism industry, particularly mountaineering and nature-related activities, constitutes only 10% of the overall tourism. The majority of these tourists are part of meticulously organized trips by prominent international tourism agencies, some of which are not native to Nepal. This dynamic restricts the potential for local rural communities to garner significant income from tourism services, as a substantial portion of the profits remains with these external agencies.

While this is a common scenario, certain rural villages situated along trekking routes, national parks, and key ecotourism destinations perceive tourism as a catalyst for growth. They have adapted and developed services highly appreciated by international visitors. For instance, in the Rasuwa district, home to Langtang National Park, villages have integrated Western amenities into their tea houses, providing accommodation services that now include Western-style toilets, hot showers, filtered water, menus with Western food options, coffee machines, and bakeries. This proactive approach by local communities has significantly enhanced their income-earning opportunities. The services offered, tailored to ecotourism standards, are highly valued by tourists, who are willing to pay up to four times the actual value of the commodities. This innovative mindset among local communities reflects a positive trend where tourism becomes a driver of economic empowerment in these regions.

On the flip side, there is well-documented evidence pointing to the potential environmental damage caused by the surge in tourist arrivals to natural areas. While a certain degree of human footprint is unavoidable, the absence of robust enforcement of sustainable tourism policies designed to alleviate the adverse effects of these activities is concerning. Issues such as inadequate waste management, water pollution, deforestation, land degradation, and carbon emissions resulting from the use of helicopters for sightseeing pose significant threats to the environment. The impact on the local fauna and flora further underscores the potential devastation if ecotourism continues to expand without stringent regulations in place.

Conservationist institutions, exemplified by the National Trust for Nature Conservation, have successfully implemented and promoted impactful measures in the Annapurna region. One notable initiative involves the adoption of improved cooking stoves, replacing traditional open-air fires. This shift has been instrumental in maximizing the utilization of wood as fuel, reaching an efficiency rate of 70%. The improved stoves serve multiple purposes concurrently, including cooking, space heating, and providing hot water for showers. This innovative approach has resulted in a significant reduction in deforestation in the area.

These small and cost-effective actions have not only transformed the ecological impact of tourism activities but have also yielded positive health outcomes for users. The reduction in smoke and carbon dioxide emissions contributes to an overall improvement in environmental conditions and the well-being of individuals in the region.

Recognizing the pivotal role of community involvement in fostering economic development through tourism, the government plays a crucial role in shaping policies and strategies. These initiatives aim to enhance the capacities of local populations, with a specific emphasis on the integral involvement of women in economic activities. While numerous action plans and policies have been formulated, there persists a notable gap between the development of written policies and their effective implementation. This divide extends further to the actual impact on the most vulnerable populations in rural areas, encompassing women and children. Bridging this gap is imperative for ensuring that the intended benefits of these policies reach and positively impact the marginalized segments of the population.

Non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have played a pivotal role in rural development, particularly through the implementation of bottom-up strategies. These approaches have demonstrated a significant impact on economic growth, effectively enhancing both community and individual capacities. The result has been an improvement in living conditions and an expansion of opportunities for the residents in these rural areas.

VIII. Conclusions

The potential for leveraging tourism as a meaningful driver of economic development is contingent upon a comprehensive analysis of tourism statistics. The Nepal Tourism Board's ongoing data collection efforts serve as a valuable resource, enhancing our understanding of both the tourism and ecotourism markets, which have consistently shown an upward trend over the years. To fully realize their potential in fostering economic growth in Nepal's rural areas, strategic measures must be taken. This includes investing in infrastructure, enforcing and empowering regulations and sustainable policies, strengthening stakeholders and partnerships, and adopting a bottom-up approach to enhance community-based activities. The future outcome relies on proactive measures that capitalize on the positive momentum observed in tourism statistics to the advantage of rural economies.

Infrastructure plays a pivotal role in fostering the growth of the tourism industry, particularly in the realms of ecotourism and rural development. This encompasses crucial elements such as road and air access, maps and conspicuous signage, efficient transportation, and accommodation services. Ensuring the provision of safe and clean water and food is equally imperative. Each facet of this infrastructure must undergo meticulous maintenance, promotion, regulation, registration, monitoring, and development to effectively showcase a tourism destination. Unfortunately, the inadequacies in managing tourism infrastructure have curtailed the appeal of Nepal, particularly its remote and rural areas, as a viable destination for potential visitors.

Tourism has the potential to be a significant economic driver, fostering livelihoods and creating opportunities for communities in Nepal. However, without addressing the existing environmental challenges in cities and communities, tourism could exacerbate environmental

issues. The contamination of riverine systems with sewage, elevated levels of air pollution, and inadequate waste management solutions pose serious threats to both health and poverty.

Regarding tourism as a source of employment, especially with a focus on gender equality, the aspiration to improve conditions for retaining the youth workforce has not been adequately realized. Training and education initiatives within the tourism sector, encompassing hospitality management, technical skills for ecotourism, English language proficiency, and the enhancement of capacities to deliver quality products and services, have not effectively reached rural communities, particularly women.

Women, constituting a vulnerable sector, face the risk of being left behind due to male migration, coupled with the burden of significant unpaid care duties. Addressing these challenges requires a more targeted and comprehensive approach to ensure that training and education opportunities are inclusive and accessible, thus empowering women in rural areas to actively participate and benefit from the opportunities within the tourism industry.

Recognizing the crucial role played by non-governmental organizations, community-based organizations, and social businesses in rural development in Nepal is essential for empowering them as catalysts of improvement and sustainability. From cooperatives to associations that foster capacity-building, to individuals whose economic activities contribute to the community, there exists a virtuous cycle that must be actively promoted, replicated, and empowered for sustained progress.

Partnerships and collaboration with stakeholders are crucial to addressing the gaps observed in policy implementation. Given the substantial amount of international aid and the involvement of international institutions in development programs focused on rehabilitation, reconstruction, and overall development, their contribution is essential. This becomes especially pertinent as the public system has demonstrated weaknesses in effectively managing and implementing strategies aimed at elevating Nepal to a middle-income economy. The support of international efforts aligns with the country's aspirations for sustainable and rural development.

IX. Recommendations

Public institutions must enhance their processes and effectiveness to ensure the successful implementation of policies. It is imperative that these actions be incorporated into the Government's annual program, which serves as the final link in the policy implementation chain. The Planning Commission, operating as a distinct body, assumes responsibility for monitoring and evaluation. This commission is intricately connected to grassroots-level institutions that play a pivotal role in the social and economic development of rural areas in Nepal.

An evident constraint on the implementation, evaluation, and learning processes of governmental bodies regarding tourism policies is the lack of a regulatory body capable of actively foreseeing the interdependent actions of each public sector in the development of strategies and activities. This deficiency is underscored in the recommendations of the National Tourism Strategy Plan, advocating for a transformation of the institutions involved in implementation from passive actors into more effective working groups. This shift aims to reinvigorate the development and enhance the impact of the policies.

When considering regulations, it is evident that there are significant gaps between policies and the enforcement of rules aligned with development strategies. It is crucial to establish clear implementation processes to mitigate the risks of favoritism, corruption, and negligence in the delivery of tourism services. Recommendations highlight the importance of making certifications, codes of conduct, and registrations essential components to ensure strict compliance with the policies.

On the involvement of stakeholders to foster development, the Nepalese Government urgently needs to reassess the engagement of the private sector and foreign investment in the tourism sector. This entails establishing more favorable fiscal conditions to unlock opportunities for private sector involvement. While Nepal boasts abundant natural resources and has effectively designated protection areas that can be showcased and leveraged by the tourism industry, there's a critical need for resources to market the destination and create opportunities for local residents. These necessary resources can be secured through collaboration with foreign and private investors.

To ensure sustainable tourism, it is imperative to implement feasible solutions that actively involve the community. Without a sense of ownership of the natural environment, the mitigation process may lack the potential to effectively reduce the risk of negative impacts. Therefore, efforts should not only focus on economic benefits but also prioritize the preservation and enhancement of the environment, taking into account the active participation and commitment of the local community.

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